

Competition

Position One: Competitive Sports Are Healthy

In 1953, two American universities were playing a football game that was critical to the national ranking of each team. In the closing seconds of the first half, Team B was inside the five-yard line of Team A. The clock was running and there was only enough time for one more play, if the clock could be stopped. Team B, behind by one touchdown and one extra point, had used all its time-outs. A player from Team B fell to the ground as if injured, and the officials quickly called a time-out so that the 'injured' player could receive attention. While the clock was stopped, the quarterback of Team B was able to call a play, a substitution was made for the injured player, and the members of Team B lined up to run a play. They ran the play, scored a touchdown, successfully kicked the extra point, and went to the locker room at the half with the score now tied. Oddly enough, a nearly identical situation occurred at the end of the second half, with Team B again behind by one touchdown and one extra point. Again, a Team B player feigned an injury and his team was able to score a touchdown and an extra point to end the game in a tie.¹

Does participating in competitive sports encourage immoral behavior and deceptive actions like this one?

Participating in competitive sports is undeniably a positive experience. Douglas MacArthur said, "Participation in competitive sport is a vital character builder which molds the youth of our country for their roles as custodians of the republic."² Competition helps develop desirable personality traits and encourages discipline, persistence, teamwork, and performance under pressure. Competition is a vital part of our society and sports help prepare for it. Delattre says,

The claim of competitive athletics to importance rests squarely on their providing us opportunities for self discovery, for concentration and intensity of involvement, for being carried away by the demand of the contest . . . with a frequency seldom matched anywhere. . . . This is why it is a far greater success in competitive athletics to have played well under pressure of a truly worthwhile opponent and lost than to have defeated less worthy or unworthy ones where no demands were made.

Team competition is the highest form of cooperation, since without the cooperation of teammates and the other team, there would be no competition. Competitors cooperate with each other by following the rules in order to challenge each other's skill level and to improve their own skills. Competition is a means to self-improvement.

¹ Fraleigh, W. P. (1984). *Right Actions in Sport*. Champaign, Ill: Human Kinetics Publishers, p. 3.

² Ibid, p. 17-18.

Position Two: Competitive Sports Are Unhealthy

In 1953, two American universities were playing a football game that was critical to the national ranking of each team. In the closing seconds of the first half, Team B was inside the five-yard line of Team A. The clock was running and there was only enough time for one more play, if the clock could be stopped. Team B, behind by one touchdown and one extra point, had used all its time-outs. A player from Team B fell to the ground as if injured, and the officials quickly called a time-out so that the 'injured' player could receive attention. While the clock was stopped, the quarterback of Team B was able to call a play, a substitution was made for the injured player, and the members of Team B lined up to run a play. They ran the play, scored a touchdown, successfully kicked the extra point, and went to the locker room at the half with the score now tied. Oddly enough, a nearly identical situation occurred at the end of the second half, with Team B again behind by one touchdown and one extra point. Again, a Team B player feigned an injury and his team was able to score a touchdown and an extra point to end the game in a tie.¹

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The consequences of competition are undoubtedly negative. Competition encourages selfish and egotistical behavior. For someone to be successful somebody else must be defeated and denied what both sides want.

Competitive sports may develop desirable personality traits in winners but it discourages the healthy development of those who lose, since they don't see any good outcome of their efforts. Competition motivates people to win at all costs, without regard to the damage to others. They encourage people to equate morality with "not getting caught." The opponent is viewed as "bad," is "hated," or given undesirable stereotypes. Ogilvie and Tutko say,

We found no empirical support for the tradition that sport builds character. . . . It seems that the personality of the ideal athlete is not the result of any molding process, but comes out of the ruthless selection process that occurs at all levels of sport. . . .³

Those athletes who do have positive character traits probably would have them even if they never played a sport. In fact, they may have those characteristics in spite of playing sports.

The value of competition in our society is highly overrated. The ability to cooperate with others and work together are more desirable and a better preparation for life.

¹ Fraleigh, W. P. (1984). *Right Actions in Sport*. Champaign, Ill: Human Kinetics Publishers, p. 3.

³ Simon, Robert. (1985). *Sports and Social Values*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, p. 15-16.